



BRAHMĪ ALPHABET OF NORTH WESTERN INDIA

4th-5th Centuries A.D.

The Brāhmī alphabet of north western India of 4th and 5th centuries represented by the following records illustrates the next stage of the development of the alphabet.

1. The Abbottabad (Dist. Peshawar) inscription of the time of Kadambeshvaradāsa of the year 25¹.
2. The Mathura inscription of Candragupta II G.E. 61=A.D. 380².
3. The Mathura stone inscription of Candragupta II³.
4. The Shorkot (Salt Range) inscription of the year 83⁴.
5. The Tusam (dist. Hissar) rock inscription⁵.
6. The Bower Manuscript⁶.
7. Chilas (dist. Gilgit) inscriptions⁷.

Initial Vowels (see Table I B)

1. The initial *a* shows at the lower end of the left limb a curve open to the left in the Tusam inscription (col. IV) and the Bower manuscript (col. VI).
2. In the initial *ā* the length of the vowel is marked by a curve open to the left in the Mathura inscription of G.E. 61 (col. II) and the Bower manuscript (col. VI). In the Chilas inscription number 61 (col. VII) the letter has a peculiar form with the left limb represented by a big curve open to the left and a small slanting stroke attached to its lower end. The length of the vowel is marked by a horizontal stroke attached to the middle of the vertical.
3. In initial *i* the lower dot in the Bower manuscript (col. VI) has been provided with a curve.
4. In the initial *ī* in the same record the upper and the lower dots of the ancient sign which consisted of the four dots in the position of a square have been converted into a vertical stroke with a wedge at each end.
5. In initial *u* the curve at the lower end is drawn further to the left (Bower manuscript col. VI)
6. The initial *ū* is formed like *u* with the addition of a small slanting stroke attached to the back of *u* near the top (Bower manuscript. col. VI)
7. The initial *r* shows a peculiar form in the Bower manuscript.
8. In *e* the base of the triangle is mostly at the top.
9. In *ai* in the Bower manuscript (col. VI) the flag like line marking the length of the vowel has been attached to the vertex of triangular *e* with base below.

10. *o* is formed like *u* with the additional of a wedge at the left top end. (Bower manuscript col. VI).
11. *au* is formed like *o* with the additional of a hook at the back (col. VI).

Consonants

1. In *k* the earlier straight cross bar becomes a cursive bar. Occasionally the end of cursive stroke on the left is brought down to meet the foot of the central vertical resulting in the formation of a loop as in the Bower manuscript (col. VI).
2. In *kh* the loop on the left becomes a triangle as in the Tusam inscription (col. IV) and the Chilas inscription (col VII).

3. *ga* shows both cursive and flat top with right hand vertical elongated downwards. The letter also develops small horizontal bar or a wedge or loop at the end of the left vertical.

4. *gha* in the Shorkot inscription (col. V) has a peculiar form with all the three verticals provided with hollow triangles at the top. The top mark represented by a hollow triangle is a peculiar feature of the inscription.

5. *ñ* shows a wedge or a button at the right top end (cols. II, IV).

6. *c* is most beaked in form.

7. *ch* consists of two circles attached to the top bar with a small vertical as in the past.

8. *j* which is very conservative in development shows a slanting central bar in Tusam inscription (col. IV) and Bower manuscript (col. VI). In all cases the upper most horizontal bar merges with the top bar. In the Chilas inscription (col. VII) the lower most horizontal bar ends in a curve.

9. *jh* occurs only in the Bower manuscript (col. VI) and is characterised by a top bar with a vertical attached to its left end and an angular hook attached to the vertical in the middle.

10. *ñ* while occurs only in conjunction with *c* and *j* is represented by a cursive down stroke with another small cursive stroke attached to it at the back (cols. II, VI).

11. *t* is sometimes flattened at the top as in Mathura inscription (col II) and the Bower manuscript (col. VI).

12. *th* has likewise been flattened on the right in the Mathura inscription (col. II).

13. In *d* the lower straight strike has been converted into a curve into the Tusam inscription (col. IV) and the Bower manuscript (col. VI).

14. In *dh* the loop is missing in the Chilas inscription No. 60 (col. VII).

15. In *ṇ* the curves at the either end of the base stroke are turned sharply round. A

peculiar form is found in Chilas inscription No. 61 (col. VII).

16. In *t* the earlier sloping strokes now become cursive.
17. In *th* the earlier dot now becomes regularly a straight bar.
18. In *d* the bulge is now more pronounced.
19. *dh* is regularly flattened on the right.
20. *n* consisting of two strokes of unequal length attached to the top bar with a small vertical is now more angular in shape.
21. The development in *p* is marked by the elongation of the right hand vertical in the Bower manuscript (col. VI).
22. *ph* has a peculiar angular shape in the Mathura inscription of G.E. 61 (col. II). In the Bower manuscript (col VI) the loop marking the aspirate is sometimes attached on the right instead of on the inside. In a few cases we have only the open curve on the right.
23. *b* shows a bend in the left arm in the Shorkot inscription (col. V).
24. *bh* shows angular form in the Mathura inscription (col. II). In other example³ it is cursive. A developed form is found in the Bower manuscript (col. VI) with a wedge (solid or open) on the left.
25. In *m* the development is marked by the twisted left limb. The later form with straight left limb is found sometimes in the Bower manuscript (col. VI). The Mathura inscription (col. II) retains the earlier form. The letter has been provided with a flat top in the Abbottabad inscription (col I).
26. *y* occurs regularly with a loop on the left caused by the contact of the left hand stroke with the horizontal base. The intervening form is found in the Mathura inscription (col II). In the Chilas inscriptions (col VII) we sometimes find the older form and the form where the curve on the left is turned round instead of inside to form the loop.
27. *r* which generally retains the archaic form shows an upward slant at the foot of the vertical in the Tusam inscription (col IV) and a small wedge in the Bower manuscript (col. VI). The two features signify an important development. In Shorkot (col V) the letter shows a small triangle at the foot as at the top.
28. In *l* the curve on the left is turned more sharply round and the right hand stroke shows sometimes downward elongation as in the Mathura inscription (col. II), the Shorkot inscription (col. V) and the Bower manuscript (col VI).
29. *v* is both cursive and angular in shape.
30. In *sh* the top is sometimes flattened as in the Mathura inscription (col. II), the Shorkot inscription (col V) and the Bower manuscript (col VI). The development

examples

form

is marked throughout by the elongation of the right hand vertical.

31. *ṣ* is universally angular in shape. The earlier cursive form becomes rare.
32. *s* shows a hooked left limb considered a mark distinguishing the western form of the letter from its eastern variety. In the Bower manuscript (col VI) the significant development is noticed in the conversion of the hook into a triangle or a wedge.
33. *h* shows downward elongation of the right hand curve.
34. Examples of *jihvāmūliya* and *upadmāniya* are found only in the Bower manuscripts (col. VI).

Medial Vowels

1. Medial *a* is expressed by a curve (cols. I, VI) or a button (col. VI), or an upward stroke (cols. III, IV, VII) or a small downward stroke (col. IV, VI, VII) attached to the right top end of the consonant. In case of *j* (cols. III, IV, VII) the stroke is attached to the end of the middle bar. In some cases the sign is expressed by a button attached to the right top end in the Bower manuscript. In *tha* in the Chilas inscription No. 61 (col. VII) the downward curve expressing the length of the vowel has been attached to the middle of the letter.
2. The curve of medial *i* is sometimes inordinately lengthened and drawn to the level of the bottom of the letter (col. II, III, VII) or below (col. VI).
3. Medial *ī* is marked as earlier by a sickle shape curve.
4. The medial *u* is rendered either by the lengthening of the right hand vertical of the letter (cols. I, II, III, IV, V), or by a curve open to the left attached to the bottom of the letter (cols. II, IV, V, VI, VII). In the Bower manuscript the sign is also expressed by a wedge attached to the bottom of the letter. In case of *tu* in the Chilas inscription No. 61 (col. VII) the vowel has been marked by a down stroke attached to the end of the base curve.
5. The medial *ū* is rendered either by a cursive horizontal line attached to the bottom of the consonant on the left side (cols. VI, VII) or by the subscribed sign for initial *u* (col. VI). In case of *pū* in the Mathura inscription (col. II) the sign has been expressed as in the case of *pu*.
6. The medial *r* is expressed by a curve open to the left and attached to the lower end of the consonant.
7. Medial *e* is expressed by a cursive upward stroke placed over the top of the letter (cols. II, VI, VII) or by a knob attached to the left top end of the consonant. In case of *r* the vowel has been marked by a horizontal bar attached to the top end of the letter in the Mathura inscription (col. II) and the Abbottabad inscription (col. I).
8. The medial *ai* is expressed either by two superscribed strokes (col. VI) or by a

single stroke combined with a knob at the left top end. In the Mathura inscription of G.E. 61 (col. II) the sign has been rendered by a superscribed stroke combined with two small down strokes at the either end of the top.

9. The medial *o* is expressed either by two small down strokes or buttons attached to both sides of the top of the letter (cols. IV, VI) or by the two superscribed strokes (col. I, II, IV, V, VI, VII). In one case in *do* in the Tusam inscription (col. IV) it has been expressed by a superscribed stroke combined with a small down stroke attached to the right end of the top bar.
10. The medial *au* is formed by two superscribed strokes combined with the small down stroke or button at the left top end (cols. III, IV, VI) or by a single superscribed stroke combined with the sign for medial *O* (cols. II, III, VI).

Ligatures

1. The superscribed *r* is marked by a small vertical attached to the top of the letter.
2. The subscribed *r* is marked by a straight, slanting or upward stroke attached to the bottom of the letter on the left.
3. *y* as the final element in ligatures is always bipartite in form. Its right end is drawn sometimes as high as the top of the letter (cols. III).
4. Other noteworthy ligatures have been illustrated in the table.

REFERENCES

1. *Epigraphia Indica* Vol. XXX, p. 59 and plate.
2. *Ibid* Vol XXI, pp. 8-9 and plate.
3. Fleet, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* Vol. III, pp. 25-27, plate II A.
4. *op. cit* Vol. XVI, p. 15 and plate.
5. Fleet *op. cit*, pp. 269-70 plate XLA.
6. Hoernle, *The Bower Manuscript* Archaeological Survey of India (New Imperial Series) Vol. XXII.
7. Dani Ahmad Hasan, *CHILAS*, p. 75 plate No. 55 p. 79 plate No. 60, 61.